

AMA seeks probe of journal editors' actions

March 30 2009, By LINDSEY TANNER , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- The American Medical Association is seeking an investigation of claims that editors of its leading medical journal threatened a whistleblower who pointed out a researcher's conflict of interest.

Editors of the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#) deny threatening a professor who raised concerns about a study author's financial ties to industry - ties that were not disclosed when JAMA published the study last year. JAMA, like most leading medical journals, has a policy of noting a scientist's financial ties to companies whose drugs they are researching.

According to the Wall Street Journal, JAMA [editors](#) threatened to ban the professor from their journal and ruin his medical school's reputation if he didn't stop talking to reporters.

The editors deny that. But the flap prompted them to spell out what amounts to a gag order on anyone who alerts the medical journal about suspicions that a researcher has undisclosed industry ties. The journal editors argue that any suspicions should be kept secret until JAMA can complete its own probe. That is an existing policy, JAMA's editor-in-chief, Dr. Catherine DeAngelis, told The Associated Press on Monday.

AMA journals are independent and the medical association doesn't interfere with what they publish. But AMA said Friday it has asked an independent oversight committee to investigate how JAMA editors handled the issue.

"As owner and publisher of JAMA, we take these concerns very seriously," AMA board chairman Dr. Joseph Heyman said in a written statement.

The issue involves a study published in JAMA last May that said the drug Lexapro prevents depression in stroke patients. A Tennessee university professor who reads JAMA told the editors in October that he had learned that a study author had served as a speaker for Lexapro's maker.

JAMA editors vowed to investigate.

The professor, Jonathan Leo of Lincoln Memorial University, also discussed his concerns in a March 5 letter posted on a different medical journal's Web site.

On March 11, JAMA editors published a correction revealing the undisclosed ties to Lexapro's maker.

JAMA's editors acknowledged in a March 20 editorial being upset about Leo airing his concerns. They argue that publicizing unconfirmed allegations about study authors could unfairly damage reputations and interfere with JAMA's own investigations.

On the Net:

American Medical Association: <http://www.ama-assn.org>

JAMA: <http://jama.ama-assn.org>

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